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Updates and Announcements

University January 13, 2025 Response to Task Force on Caste Discrimination Report

The university administration is grateful to the members of the University Task Force on Caste Discrimination for their diligent and collaborative work examining potential issues of caste-related discrimination at Rutgers, and for the recommendations the task force has offered. The task force was established in response to the agreement between the University and AAUP-AFT to form a joint committee to explore this topic, and the administration appreciates all the work that was done to fulfill this commitment.

Rutgers stands firmly against harassment and discrimination in all their forms. The task force members clearly share this institutional commitment. Through our policies in these areas, the university makes our values and our expectations explicit. The breadth of our policies provides the university important latitude to enforce them, and our policies are designed to comply fully with state and federal law in this area.

The task force report has generated important discussion and review around how Rutgers' policies address potential cases of discrimination based on caste and around how the university collects—and responds to—information in this area.

After careful review, the university has determined that current university policy and protected class categories provide protections against caste discrimination.

The Office of Employment Equity (OEE) is charged with supporting “the University’s commitment to preventing discrimination and advancing equal opportunity in employment.” To that end, OEE administers the Policy Prohibiting Discrimination and Harassment, 60.1.12,

which prohibits discrimination and harassment based upon various protected classes. The



Policy enumerates race, religion, ethnicity, ancestry, and national origin as protected categories (among others).

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Rutgers has taken the position that caste can and does fall within some, or all, of those classes, depending on the factual circumstances. Specifically:

Religion - Caste identity is generally linked to religious practice, placing someone in a hierarchy within a religious community, usually in religious terms such as purity. Consequently, discrimination based on caste is discrimination that is based on one's role in their religious community and is therefore a form of religious discrimination.

Ancestry - Caste is often defined as an individual's position in a social stratification system based on inherited status, making ancestry an applicable protected class.

National origin - National origin discrimination involves treating applicants or employees unfavorably because they are from a particular country or part of the world, because of ethnicity or accent, or because they appear to be of a certain ethnic background (even if they are not). This means that if an employee is discriminated against or harassed because they have an involuntary membership in, for example, a South Asian caste hierarchy, the Policy would apply.

Race - While the Policy and applicable law do not define "race," the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission has opined that it can include discrimination based on ancestry, or physical or cultural characteristics associated with a certain race. As such, potential incidents of caste-based discrimination could fit within this definition as well.

Because caste is already covered by the Policy Prohibiting Discrimination and Harassment, the university will not be taking steps to amend this policy at this time.

The task force report calls attention to the importance of clearly communicating our policies. The university will communicate through appropriate venues, including the Office of Employment Equity website, to make clear that current university policy covers potential caste-based discrimination. The report references members of the Rutgers community who believe that they have been subject to caste discrimination. As described above, Policy 60.1.12 provides numerous avenues for someone who may be the victim of caste discrimination. The university asks that the task force encourage those members of our

community to reach out to OEE. OEE's Intake Support Specialist, who has been trained on caste discrimination, is available to help them understand the scope of Policy 60.1.12 and to guide them through the complaint process.

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The report underscores the importance of gathering additional data about potential caste-based discrimination within our community. The university community understands the importance of routinely assessing our policies and practices to ensure that they are reflective of and support our values, expectations, and commitment to a culture of equity, inclusion, integrity, and respect. Tracking and assessing workplace culture and the student experience are areas where Rutgers must strive to continually improve. To this end, the Office of University Equity and Inclusion conducts a regular campus climate survey [<https://diversity.rutgers.edu/dei-climate-survey>], to which we will add questions related to caste discrimination. This data will be critical in informing future steps in terms of training and communication.

In a broader sense, the university administration has committed to ongoing efforts to survey faculty, staff, and students around all facets of their experiences on our campuses and in our workplaces. Training is a critical part of tracking and assessment, and the university will continue to develop trainings that are responsive to the data we collect and the needs of our community.

Task Force on Caste Discrimination Report

University Statement on the Posting of this Report

Rutgers stands firmly against discrimination of all types. During our last union contract negotiation, the University agreed with the Rutgers AAUP-AFT to form a joint Task Force to examine issues of potential caste discrimination impacting students and union members, best practices to respond to caste-based discrimination, and whether to include "caste" as a protected category within its Policy on Discrimination and Harassment. The report produced by the co-chairs, which contains the recommendations agreed to by the majority of the Task Force, is posted here, consistent with the requirements of the agreement with the AAUP-AFT.

The posting of this report does not reflect the university's agreement with, or adoption



of the findings and conclusions set forth in the report. As it does with all task forces, the university will review and assess the recommendations in the report.

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Rutgers Caste Report August 2024.pdf
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